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ABSTRACT

Day care programs in the Scandinavian countries have been viewed as exemplary models to transfer to Canada and the United States. This publication, which provides an overview of day care in Denmark, Sweden and Norway, discusses conditions, facts, and programs contributing to the widespread acclaim. It is pointed out that day care in Denmark is an integral part of the child policy of the nation; staff are exceptionally well prepared; facilities are excellent; activities made available to children are varied and stimulating; parental involvement is strongly encouraged; and vacations away from the day care institution are arranged for all children. In Sweden, public debate over day care is no longer concerned with whether it should or should not be provided, but rather with the question of "what constitutes good day care." It is hoped that public debate of this question will contribute to the reduction of social and economic segregation in housing. Of the three countries, Norway appears to have the most eclectic and decentralized approach to providing day care. The Norwegian policy toward day care is not situated in the context of a social welfare policy, but is an important component of national policy on the family. (RH)

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Day Care in Scandinavia

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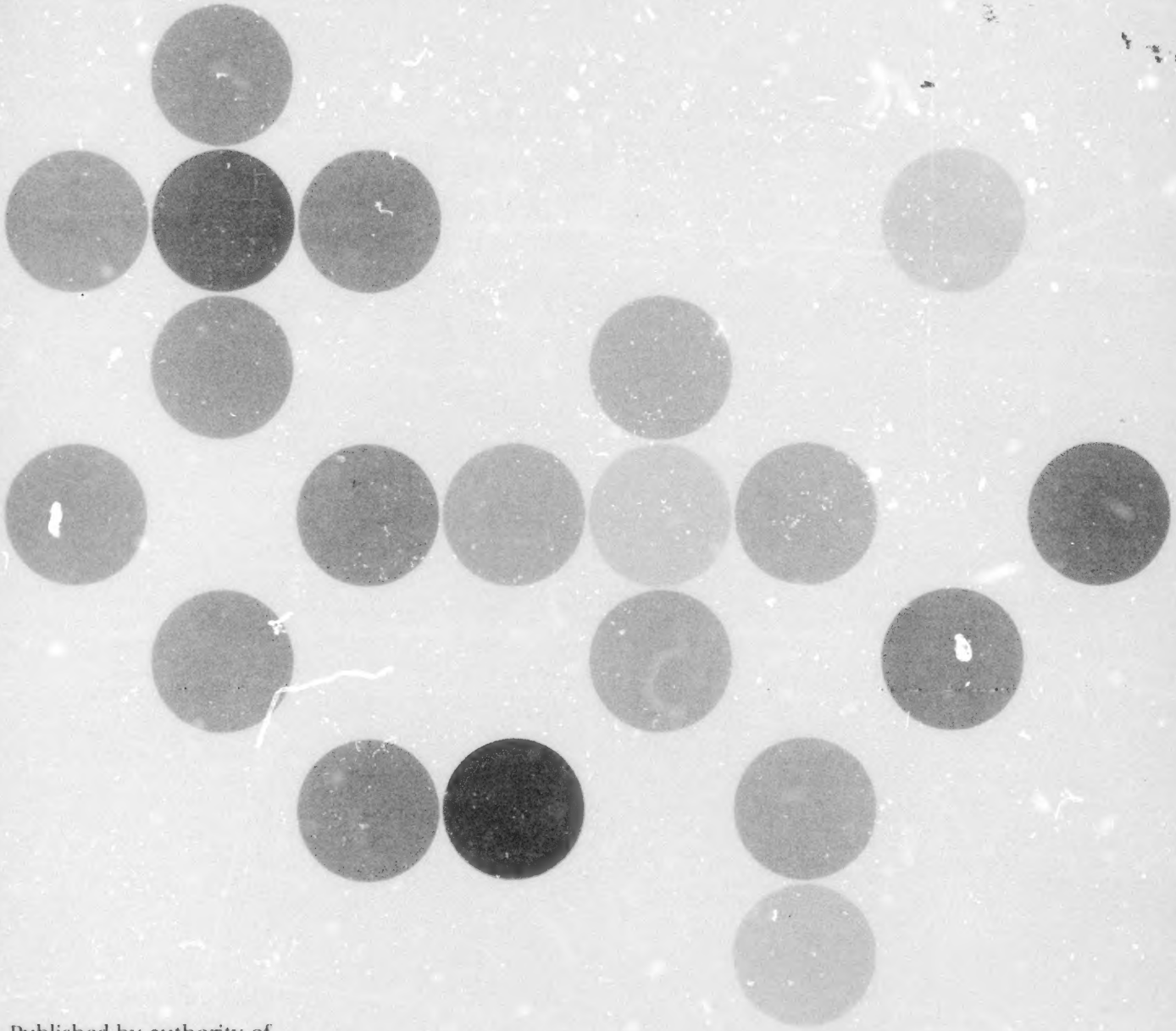
Day Care in Scandinavia: Denmark, Sweden and Norway



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Introduction

The Scandinavian countries, Denmark, Sweden and Norway, present us with social, political, cultural and economic conditions that are distinctly different from what we know. Gösta Esping-Andersson, a Danish sociologist now at MIT, has pointed out that the Scandinavian countries are unique in their welfare policy, not that they provide bigger and better benefits than others, but rather in their ambition to establish and even almost institutionalize solidarity, economic equality, and social security by means of their welfare system. He goes on to suggest that the egalitarian effects have been most outstanding in Norway and Sweden where the aim has been to practically abolish all differences of status. The objective of a policy in which a country attempts to provide for the well-being of all its people is unique to the welfare system implemented across Scandinavia. Child care falls under the jurisdiction of the national welfare policy and thus abides by the same rules and witnesses the same variations that apply to other state-subsidized programs.

Child welfare specialists from North America have often referred to day care programs in the Scandinavian countries as exemplary models to transfer to Canada and the United States (Wagner & Wagner, 1976). Why have the Scandinavian countries achieved this status from comparative studies? What conditions exist in Denmark, Sweden and Norway, that make it so good for children? These questions and more will be addressed in the following pages to provide some answers to people working with, for, and around young children in Canada.

Day Care in Denmark

Political and cultural conditions

In Denmark, day care policy is a national concern reflected within the overall child policy of the country. This policy recognizes that there is a strong connection between work, social life, family life and the quality of the child's life. Thus, the Danish day care policy recognizes the acute interrelationship of the political, social, cultural and economic conditions of the nation as factors influencing the lives of children. The following goals are significant in our attempts to understand why day care in Denmark is so well developed and sought after as a model by other countries:

1 to reflect a policy towards the equality between the sexes;

2 to attempt to provide for social equality;

3 to be designed so as to be flexible to meet the changing needs of a family;

4 to maintain neutrality, in that society should be neutral in the family's desire to live in certain ways.

These global goals have become the guiding principles for the establishment of a service delivery system for children and families in Denmark. More recently, 1976-1981, the **Government's Child Welfare Commission** examined the specific issues concerning:

- Family policy in Denmark
- Housing and environment conditions
- Day care institutions
- Early efforts to ensure a healthy emotional, physical and social development.

The five-year inquiry of the Commission led to the formulation of numerous goals in the Government's Policy for Children:
— to respect the child as an individual human being in the family and society;
— to give the child a central position in the life of grown-ups;
— to promote in a wide sense, the physical conditions under which children grow up, and
— to even out differences in the living conditions of children, both in a material sense and in a cultural sense.

The brief summary of the attitudes and goals reflected by the Child Welfare Commission and currently being implemented by various levels of government, education, social affairs and cultural affairs, has contributed to the general public debate over the living conditions of children, and to the formulation of goals for early childhood education.

Social and economic conditions

Changing social conditions accompanying urbanization, geographic mobility, technological advancement and economic concerns have impact upon the lives of children. In Denmark, 80% of mothers are working, 40% of them part-time; separation and divorce cases are increasing the number of single parent families, and young people are living in less stable conditions than previously. Children grow up in families with few or no siblings and live periodically or all the time with only one parent. These conditions, combined with traffic hazards and high density housing developments, cause many Danes to express concern about the time and quality of opportunities available for children to explore their environment when growing up under such circumstances. In an attempt to recognize the impact of these social and economic conditions, the Danish government has opted for a model of comprehensive planning and intervention so as to restrict the harmful effects of social, economic and technological developments on children. Day care services in Denmark have been developed in the context of the above conditions and thereby serve to be one of the components of a national policy for children.

Group day care

Current practice in the provision of day care for children in Denmark is part of a comprehensive service delivery system for children; social, cultural and educational. Compulsory education in Denmark starts at 7 years of age. Thus the half-day programs attended by 90% of 5 to 6-year-old children in the local schools are essentially the same as the "kindergarten" programs attended by 5-year-old children. Many of these children moreover also attend "børnehaver" or day care centres which are located sometimes adjacent to the school, or sometimes in a separate building some distance from the school, but usually within the child's neighbourhood. The day centres for 3 to 6-year-old children all have access to outdoor play facilities. This applies to urban centres as well as to those in suburban housing developments. There are 2346 such day care facilities located throughout Denmark, providing 101 205 places for young children. These day care centres are, in a rather startling way, of the highest quality with respect to the child-staff ratio, the building facility, play materials, and the demonstrated competencies of the staff. In this respect they are similar to excellent day care centres in Canada serving this age group, size and socio-economic mixed population.

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Integrated institutions

As the educational system in Denmark provides for a gradual beginning to the long school day, young children 7-10 years of age go to school initially only half-day, and then with increasingly longer hours to study their subject areas. This "flexible time" innovative educational programming has contributed to the development of recreational programs such as "integrated institutions", which serve children from birth to 14 years of age. These centres are essentially the result of a belief in the culture of childhood, and reflect a concern towards preventing the alienation of children of different ages from each other. The term integration in this case refers therefore to age group integration rather than to special needs. The institutions are open to children when they are not in school and have some functional similarities to the "after-school" day care programs which have become more popular in Canada in the past decade. The quality of the facilities, equipment and staff-child ratio which are available to enhance the opportunities of the Danish youngsters in these programs is remarkable. Within the 499 integrated facilities throughout Denmark, the majority of the 30 777 places are comprised of children between 3 and 7 years of age. These institutions are often located near or within a large open green space which provides ample space for outdoor activities; gardening, building houses, caring for animals and numerous other activities. The children under 3 years of age in these facilities are looked after by specially designated and trained staff from within the larger program. The size of the group depends on the age but does not exceed 12 children and includes three or four adults, again depending on the age of the children

Programs for children under 3 years of age

As indicated earlier, many mothers with young children are working and, as elsewhere in the world, this raises the problem of child care for the family. Many parents begin the hunt for appropriate child care services early in the pregnancy and place the unborn child on a registration waiting list for the preferred program. There are 586 infant-toddler facilities throughout the country providing places for 20 421 children between birth and 2 years of age inclusive. In addition to these programs, many parents opt for private foster homes "family day care" services for their children. Recent surveys in Denmark have shown that parents prefer the private home arrangement for their child during the first year, on a ratio of three to one. However, in the second year that ratio decreases, and as the child reaches the third year the ratio in actual use of home care versus group care is 1 to 1. Apparently the parents have come to recognize the important social, cultural and pedagogical influences of the group care facilities as more than ¾ of the 58% of 3-year-olds enrolled in day care attend group facilities. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note the selective use and progression of day care services and options available to parents with young children in Denmark. Figures from the Danish Ministry of Education show that 37.5% of all children under 3 years of age and 53% between 3 and 7 years are attending these programs.

Summary

It is difficult to generalize, although some statements can be made about day care in Denmark. It is an integral part of the child policy of the nation; the staff are exceptionally well prepared; the facilities are clean, bright, airy, and well equipped; the activities made available to children are varied and stimulating; parental involvement on the board and in the life of the child in the centre is strongly encouraged, and vacations away from the day care institution are arranged for all children. With such a list of characteristics what could possibly be wrong? From previous visits and research into this area, the major problems confronting day care in Denmark are the concern for the "ghettoization" of children expressed by Professor Vibeke Bidstrup of the Royal Danish Institute for the Studies of Education, and the degree of difference between the commitment of individual municipalities as regards day care expansion and the different day care options preferred. These day care concerns appear universal; however it appears fair to conclude that the problems commonly plaguing North American day care centre personnel appear to have been resolved in Denmark. In fact the distinction between half-day programs and full-day programs, as well as the distinction between private vs public, are non existent issues in Denmark, as all day care services are funded 80% by the state and depend solely on the municipal or parent fees for the remaining operating costs. Every parent is encouraged to pay on a scale adjusted to income. However, the following social and political viewpoint reinforces the importance placed on day care in Denmark. Agnete Engberg, of the Danish Ministry of Education, states in **Early Childhood and Pre-School Education in Denmark** "that all citizens should have equal access to make use of public facilities such as schools, libraries, hospitals, recreation centres, open-air grounds etc. — a viewpoint adopting the principle that the authorities should make such service (including day care) available to all" (p. 7). The challenge ahead for Danes appears to be centred on continued improvement and growth in day care and children's services as projected demand warrants, within severe and complex economic conditions.

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Day Care in Sweden

Social — economic conditions

In Sweden the national child care programs are largely administered by the municipalities and their level of support and program development depends largely upon the positions of the local political parties in power. In this respect there are some similarities between the Danish administrative structure and that which operates in Sweden. However, as we elaborate further on day care in Sweden we begin to see some differences. The child care system in Sweden includes programs for children between birth and 12 years of age. Day care for children includes infant-toddler programs, group day care, family day care, and after-school recreational programs. The comprehensive child care policy and delivery system attempts to respond to the needs of the society in which compulsory education starts at 7 years of age. In 1975, however, a new law made it mandatory for all local schools to provide a "pre-school" place for every child in the municipality who turns 6 years old in the fall semester. These part-time programs within the schools operate on a half-day basis, normally three hours per day. As in Denmark, attendance in these programs is optional but the majority of six-year-old Swedish children do attend. This program is essentially similar in function to the kindergartens offered in Canada, excepting age and specific program variations.

The provision of public care in Sweden started in the late 19th century and follows similar historical patterns as day nursery programs in Canada. The first public initiatives aimed at creating a better designed system of early childhood education were undertaken in the 1930's and 1940's on the basis of recommendations by government commissions. The 1968 Commission on Child Centres further refined existing policy and firmly established the framework from which Sweden would build its current child care delivery system. The recommendations were published by the government in 1972 and led to the first laws for "pre-school" programs going into effect in 1975. Thus the Swedish national child care system has evolved and undergone changes during recent times. Between 1950 and 1965 the number of young children enrolled in any form of early childhood education programs remained quite stable, with the exception of half-day nursery school programs. This may well be explained by the fact that industrialization did not really affect rapid urban expansion in Sweden until after the Second World War and that as late as 1965, only 27% of all women in Sweden with children under 7 years of age were employed at least part-time. The kind of service and the social economic conditions appear to have changed as 64% of mothers were working by 1980. In Sweden, day care expansion appears to coincide very dramatically with the conditions experienced by women. The improved educational opportunities, access to better employment, and profound changes within the Swedish family and labour system have contributed to the Swedish national policy of providing children with a good, secure growth environment while also providing both men and women equal opportunities to combine gainful employment with family life. Today the predominant family pattern in Sweden is the two parents working. The parental leave program in Sweden has also had an impact on the kinds of programs available. The parental leave provides compensation of 90% up to nine months in connection with childbirth. This plan is flexible and can be used by either or both parents. Recent surveys indicated that while most mothers stay home with their newborns for at least the first six months, eight out of 10 women had already resumed their jobs 12 months after a child was born. However, rarely do infant-toddler programs have children under 6 months of age in their care. This can partly be attributed to the paid parental leave program offered in Sweden. At this point in time parents who both wish to work are confronted with the problem of finding a day care centre which has room for their child.

The alert day care parent will usually have visited the centre and made arrangements for their child's enrolment months prior to actually beginning in the program. This phenomenon is due to the fact that demand for day care still exceeds the availability of space for all children.

The Association of Local Authorities has established a recommended fee scale for day care centres and family day care. It basically covers two types of fee systems: one with a fee for each day of attendance and another with a fixed monthly fee plus a flexible per day fee. Most municipalities have "sliding scale" fees that vary according to the income of the parents. The average parent pays 4000 Swedish kroner or approximately $800 Cdn. per child per year. The annual operating cost of a day care centre in Sweden is estimated at approximately 44 000 Swedish kroner or close to $9,000 Cdn. per child. The national government subsidy amounts to just over 21 000 Swedish kroner. The remainder is recovered through the municipal tax system as described earlier. State subsidy is conditional upon the following clauses: day care centres must remain open at least seven hours per day, and two-thirds of the spaces must be utilized at least five hours per child per day.

Family day care arrangements appear to receive substantially less subsidy per child space as only 3250 Swedish kroner are provided by the national government. This could be misleading, however, as the national government also subsidizes the municipality up to 35% of its gross expenses for the family day care program. In summary it is worth underlining that parent fees, while minimal in the overall costs, are dependent upon local political commitments to day care, and while the average parent pays about $800 per child per year, some parents of middle income have been known to pay as much as the equivalent of $1500 per child per year for day care. In Sweden, day care is not considered a welfare service but rather a support to the quality of family life.

Some facts

The National Bureau of Statistics reported that in early 1980, about 219 300 children or 31% of the 700 600 children aged 0-6 were accommodated in group or family day care centres. At the end of 1980, there were 129 100 group day care spaces to accommodate about 18% of the children under six years of age. In addition, 90 200 children in this age group were registered and attended family day care programs. This left 132 000 additional young children without spaces and thus forced working parents to find alternative child care arrangements. Despite the attempts to implement a program of day care expansion to meet the demand, the 1975 agreement between the Government and the Association of Local Authorities failed to reach its goal by 1980 of adding 100 000 new day care spaces. In fact, by 1980 only 65 000 new spaces had become available, thus creating a frustrating situation for the parents and children without access to services. In 1976, the Swedish parliament also established a general objective for the expansion of child care programs. This objective was to make universally available child care a reality in every municipality for all children whose parents are either working or studying, and to every child with a need for special support and encouragement. This objective was established with the hope of providing full coverage of demand for group day care and

family day care within a 10-year period ending no later than 1986. Planners, parents and early childhood educators in Sweden are now quite concerned that this objective will not be met, thus increasing the gap in availability of day care services to children and their families. Thus, while Sweden intrigues us as a model for comparative study, it looks at its own services with a critical eye and appears to have identified day care and early childhood education as an ongoing challenge for decades to come.

Programs in action

As most day care facilities are located in residential environments, the young child experiences only minor disruption in his "sense of place". The infant-toddler day care centre attempts to provide a service within a comfortable walking distance of the child's home. These centres are often located in an adapted apartment on the ground floor of an apartment building, or in a bungalow-type complex which is centrally located in the development. Both facilities are designated as day care facilities during the design phase so that their level of adaptation as a children's centre is considerable without loosing the effect of creating cosy rooms similar to a home. The attention given to "deinstitutionalizing" the infant-toddler centres is reflected in the furnishing, decor and scale of the centre. The infant-toddler programs have no more than 12 children per group and provide a ratio of 2-3 children to one supervising adult. The infants spend as much time outdoors in the play yard or community, as they do indoors.

The group day care facilities for children 2½ to 7 years of age used to be grouped according to age, whereas today it is increasingly common to see vertical grouping of children between 2½ and 7 years. These groups generally consist of between 15 and 20 children with a staff-child ratio of 4 or 5 children per supervising adult. As in Denmark, there are some innovative-experimental groups which have started to integrate children from different age groups, even from 6 months up to 12 years, thereby including children who would normally attend after school leisure time-recreation centres.

The day care centres are open at 6:30-6:45 a.m. and close between 6:00 and 6:30 p.m. so as to accommodate the working parents. In a few municipalities, state-subsidized pilot projects are experimenting with evening and all-night group day care centres as well as other forms of night-time child care.

Day care centres in Sweden are not intended to be regarded as a substitute for the parent's role but rather as an aid and supplement. In order to assure that day care is perceived and used from this perspective, much attention is being given to increasing the contacts between parents and day care centres. Parents are being encouraged to assume an active part in the programs by serving on the governing board of the centre as well as by participating in daily

activities of the program. The latter has been made possible through the parental insurance plan which entitles every parent to take a paid leave of absence for about two weeks per year to allow the child, parents and teachers to get to know each other as comfortably as possible. The insurance plan also provides parents the right to take time off from work in order to participate in the operation of the day care centre. Thus the parents have very good opportunities to participate in the lives of their young children and to perceive themselves as important to the child's development as more than just morning, night, and weekend substitutes.

Family day care

The family day care provider is allowed to take care of a maximum of 4 children, including his/her own. About 30% of family day care providers have completed a three-week training course prior to becoming care givers. They are employed by the municipality according to an agreement which regulates salary and working conditions. These agreements include guaranteed incomes even if children are absent due to illness or the like. However, these child care providers are not paid as well, nor do they have the advantages that have been obtained by other public employees.

Currently efforts are under way to attempt to arrange regular meetings between staff of the group day care centres and the family day care providers, so as to enable the more well-trained teachers to help the family day care providers with activity ideas and curriculum projects. These efforts, as well as joint groups of family day care providers, are hoped to improve the quality and cooperation between these two forms of day care.

Summary

Public debate over day care in Sweden is no longer concerned with whether it should or should not be provided, but rather with the question of "what constitutes good day care". It is hoped that public debate of this question, as well as the pilot testing of innovative programs, will lead the way for day care, as part of the overall child care system, to contribute to the reduction of the problem of social and economic segregation in housing. This problem has been identified by numerous sociological studies in Sweden, and it is a problem to which day care has been unable to offer any significant solution to date. Hopefully, the holistic approach and increased commitment to child care and the public debate about social segregation will contribute to the resolution of the serious problems of social segregation confronting young families in Sweden.

Day Care in Norway

The day care situation in Norway is somewhat different from the context described in Denmark and in Sweden. The principle of local administration and management of the national child care policy is in general terms similar to the approaches previously outlined. The Norwegian policy towards day care is however not situated in the context of a social welfare policy, but is rather a very important component of a national policy on the family. Day care is considered one of several strategies for providing support to families with young children and as such is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Consumer Affairs and Government Administration. The Norwegian Parliament has chosen a unique solution to the day care issue, a solution which necessitates a closer look at the evolution of such a policy within the political, cultural, social and economic conditions of Norway.

Overview

The Norwegian early childhood education movement was established almost 150 years ago. Programs were set up for children whose mothers had to find paid employment in order to earn a living for themselves and their families. The creche was the beginning of the movement. However, the provision of kindergartens and day care centres did not happen until early in the twentieth century. The Child Welfare Act of 1953 included legislative provisions for the establishment of day care and nursery schools. The Act reflected the growing concern among legislators to provide children below 7 years of age (school age) with special facilities and programs. The relatively steady development of the Norwegian economy, culture and social conditions during the post-war decades assured a rather low key development of early childhood education programs. However, as social change accelerated, more and more families found themselves responding to the changes, becoming financially burdened, and often uncertain about how to properly fulfil their parental roles when both were forced to work outside the home.

In 1969 a working committee (Committee on Day Institutions) was established by Parliament. This committee was asked to evaluate the need for a separate act on early childhood institutions. The report emanating from the committee Pre-schools was prepared in the form of a draft bill. It was distributed and sparked renewed public debate about early childhood experiences throughout Norway. While government grants had been made permanently available to offset the cost of operating early childhood education programs since 1963, only 155 of the 440 local municipalities had established programs by 1969. In order to reduce some of the funding problems related to the expansion of early childhood education programs, the Housing Financing Bank made it possible to finance new early childhood programs through loans. These grants were conditional upon the programs being open at least 10 months per year and that they stay open a minimum of either 6 hours per day for nursery — kindergarten programs or 9 hours per day for day care centres.

This brief sketch of the developments in early childhood education sets the tone for an appreciation of the current situation. The 1972 Report Preschools made many recommendations and raised numerous issues regarding the conditions confronting young children in Norway. Two issues emerged and became important criteria for the 1975 Act on Kindergartens (Lov om Barnehager):

1 The establishment and expansion of kindergartens and day nurseries as developed to date is neither suitable nor desirable in every town and village in Norway. In the future, a much more flexible pattern of development which seriously considers local wishes and requirements is necessary.

2 Dislike of a centrally controlled kindergarten — early childhood education system being part of the school system.

The debate over where to place early childhood education within the administrative framework of Norwegian society became an important issue as teachers and day care providers lobbied for their own territorial recognition. The issue was ultimately settled with the 1975 **Lov om Barnehager**. The act established a new administrative body the Family Affairs and Equal Status Department of the Ministry of Consumer Affairs and Government Administration, and gave it a mandate to coordinate the programs and services between different branches of government. This administrative body was to implement the objectives of the Norwegian Long-Term Program for Family Policy and as such pursue a policy to protect and strengthen the family. The following aims of the program relate specifically to early childhood conditions and serve to indicate the holistic approach taken to the issue of growing up in Norway:

— greater stability and versatility in residential areas and local environments;
— more time for togetherness in the family and activity in the local environments;
— improved housing conditions and residential environments;
— cooperation in common tasks in the local community;
— decentralization of public services;
— improved arrangements for local activities in culture, sports, outdoor life, etc.;
— to develop new forms of coordination and cooperation between administrative branches at the municipal level;
— to develop new kinds of play and activity opportunities for children;
— to develop a parent education program;
— to provide working parents with young children a right to reduce working hours without loss of job security or benefits.

In addition to working on the attainment of these goals, the Department was also accorded the administrative responsibilities for early childhood education programs, day care, nursery schools, playgrounds, youth clubs, children's workshops and summer camps. In 1975, it was estimated that the Department was administratively responsible for ECE programs enrolling more than 50 000 children under 7 years of age. The new family policy and the increased administrative coordination and support to local initiatives has contributed to the doubling of those numbers in less than five years. In 1982 it was estimated that more than 120 000 children under 7 years of age attended some form of early childhood education program. These programs and services will be described in the context of the above-mentioned policy and administrative framework and will serve to demonstrate how Norway has taken a different approach to dealing with day care.

Under the **Kindergarten Act** the Ministry of Consumer Affairs and Government Administration defined "barnehager" and "barnparken" as two specific services which provide good opportunities for the development and activities of children. These terms have commonly been misinterpreted through translation into English. The term "barnehage" is translated as "kindergarten"; however it is broadly meant to mean early childhood education programs, specifically as a "barnehage" is a program in which activities are based on educational principles and are available to children under 7 years of age

during some part of the day. In 1976 the act was further amended as follows:

"The early childhood program shall provide a good environment for children, with emphasis on play and social contact with other children and with adults. The child shall have opportunities to develop tolerance, to learn to care for others, and have opportunities for self-expression and play. In cooperation with the child's home, the program shall contribute to creating an environment for children which provides for them: care and support, individually or in groups; stimulation, opportunities for self-expression, and for learning; ethical guidance."

Within the regulation it is clearly stated that early childhood programs can be owned and operated by private organizations, business enterprises or public agencies. They must, however, be supervised by the local authority committee. This committee is elected by the local council and is responsible for the preparation of plans, for the building of early childhood facilities, for supervision of same and for the establishment and supervision of "supervised playgrounds" within the area of its jurisdiction.

Day care programs and facilities

The variety of early childhood education programs in Norway is more pronounced than what has been seen in Sweden. The facilities can be located in new buildings specifically designed and planned to be an integral part of the community. In some cases the facility is housed within an elementary school, or adjacent to such a complex. In other cases the early childhood program is located in a converted house in the country with ample outdoor play space. In fact it is fair to say that local geographic, social-cultural and economic conditions have contributed to a broad range of early education programming in Norway. Regardless of their prototype, the programs are required to abide by the following administrative requirements.

1 Local authority ECE program: shall have a management committee of 6 members.
- — 2 parent council representatives
- — 2 staff representatives
- — 2 local authority representatives

2 Private, business or public agency ECE programs: shall have a management committee of 7 members.
- — 2 parent council representatives
- — 2 staff representatives
- — 2 representatives appointed by the owner
- — 1 local authority representative

3 The director should attend all meetings of the management committee but is not entitled to vote.

4 This committee is basically responsible for the administrative well-being of the program. The mandate includes hiring and firing personnel, budget, admission policies and other administrative matters.

In addition to the above, a parent's advisory committee shall be established in all early childhood education programs, regardless of sponsorship type. This committee is made up of all parents/guardians with children in the centre. Its primary role is to ensure that the interests of parents and children are adequately met. From the committee, parents elect their representatives to the management committee. These two bodies are required of all early childhood education centres regardless of location, sponsorship or size. However in the case of centres with fewer than 20 children, the management committee is reduced by half.

Programs which enroll children for six hours or more per day are required to provide 8 m^2 of gross indoor space or more for each child over 3 years of age; and 12 m^2 gross indoor area if the child is under 3 years of age. In addition to the indoor space requirement, there must be a minimum of 25 m^2 of net play

area per child available on a playground. The space requirements for centres enrolling children for 4-6 hours per day may be somewhat lower and adapted to conditions; however the rule of thumb of 50 m^2 of gross area per child for the overall facility can only be negotiated by the local supervising authority. The only general deviation of this rule governs "short-time" programs in which children participate less than 4 hours per day. In these instances only 3 m^2 of play area per child for children aged 3-7, and 4 m^2 per child for children under 3 years of age is required. The early childhood education programs in Norway are unique in that they appear to be uniformly very electic and are highlighted by their individuality.

Adults in charge

During the early years, 1970-1975, the shortage of trained early childhood educators in Norway led to the employment of untrained women who expressed an interest in working with children. In 1974 there was a need for 500 trained early childhood educators in Norway. In order to support the diversity and ad hoc local flexibility as pertains to early childhood programs, each region, and in many cases the larger municipalities, has appointed at least one Early Childhood Education Specialist to assist with the program quality and in maintaining the standards set forth in the act. In 1981, 100 000 children, or approximately 25% of the children aged 0-7 years attended early childhood centres. The cost of operating the centres was paid by the state, municipality and parents on an average ratio of state 30%, municipality 50% and parents 20%. This scale may vary slightly between municipalities as determined by local priorities.

Summary

As in Denmark and Sweden, the public debate in Norway, the Parliamentary Commissions and the rapidly changing social structures have led the Norwegians to develop their own system for dealing with the needs of children and families. Of the three countries visited, this approach appears the most eclectric and decentralized form of providing day care. This is not to suggest that any one system is better than another for, in fact, the one very strong impression that has been given throughout the last five years of research on early childhood education in these countries, is that the quality of care, the quality of concern, the quality of pedagogical interventions, and the quality of the facilities is exceptionally outstanding.

What has been an elusive question in the past, is why and how these countries have managed to develop such visible day care programs and facilities? The answers to these questions are not simple. As has been suggested in the previous discussion and description, day care in Denmark, Sweden and Norway is integrally tied to the Child and Family Policy of each country. In the future, the challenge remains for each country to continue to provide to a greater extent for children's needs for stimulating and wide-ranging experiences. These Scandinavian countries appear to be preparing the way for the future of children in each Nordic country. Their strategies, trials and successes, are without a doubt well worth serious study by those concerned with public policy and early childhood education in Canada.

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Note:

In addition to these documents, the author has interviewed and visited numerous day care centres, recreation centres, ministry officials and researchers in Scandinavia since 1972. Information has been obtained largely from original language documents and some of the references above are intended for those who seek more information about day care in Denmark, Sweden and Norway.